



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Greater Ballysillan Masterplan
Date:	13 th December 2013
Reporting Officer:	Gerry Millar, Director of Property & Projects, Ext 6217
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	<p>Earlier this year, DSD, together with Ballysillan /Upper Ardoyne Neighbourhood Partnership and North Belfast Partnership appointed the Paul Hogarth Company to prepare a Masterplan for Greater Ballysillan. The intention for the Masterplan, which is currently out for public consultation, is that it will be used by central and local government, community organisations and the private sector to plan investment in the area over the next 10 – 20 years. The draft Masterplan recognises that many parts of Greater Ballysillan and North Belfast face significant challenges of a social, economic and political nature</p> <p>Draft Masterplan Summary:</p>
1.2	<p>The study area includes, but is not limited to, the Ballysillan /Upper Ardoyne Neighbourhood Renewal Area. This area covers a wide area of North Belfast and includes the communities of Glenbank, Benview, Sunningdale, Wheatfield and Glenbryn. Geographically, the study area extends along the Crumlin Road, Oldpark Road, Cavehill Road, Westland Road and the Ballysillan Road.</p>
1.3	<p>The proposed draft Vision Statement is: <i>“As the source of the River Farset to which Belfast owes its name, Greater Ballysillan will rise to become a vibrant and connected part of a prosperous city. Our children will be afforded access to every opportunity as they along with all residents old and new, form a positive, healthy and welcoming community, proud to call Ballysillan home.</i></p>
1.4	<p>Eight key aims and objectives are identified.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Connected Ballysillan – promote strong, connected and cohesive communities with improved access to Belfast City Centre and wider region. • A Sustainable Ballysillan – to secure stable levels of population while increasing opportunities for employment and access to decent and affordable homes. • A Healthy Ballysillan – to reduce health inequalities and promote the health and wellbeing of all residents. • A Diverse Ballysillan – to recognise, respect and celebrate North Belfast’s cultural heritage and diversity in a way that reflects its interests of people from all sections of society.

- **An Empowered Ballysillan** – support existing and encouraging new local business ventures while raising levels of educational achievement and skills base across North Belfast.
- **A Vibrant Ballysillan** – develop Ballysillan as a vibrant destination for social and economic activity.
- **A Natural Ballysillan** – to make better use of Ballysillan's natural resources while protecting and enhancing its bio diversity and unique landscape setting.
- **A Welcoming Ballysillan** – forge an environment which is inviting and embraces new residents and visitors from all communities.

1.5 The draft Masterplan is set out in a number of themes and proposed immediate, short medium and long term projects, as follows:

A: Into Action: Laying the Groundwork for future regeneration. Proposed immediate projects include:

- (i) **Capacity Building** – working at local level to deliver community regeneration
- (ii) **Targeting Dereliction** – joined up approach; priority on quick wins
- (iii) **Meanwhile Uses** – identifying vacant buildings suitable for socially beneficial uses
- (iv) **Communication Channels** – improving communication between public and community

B: Sustainable Neighbourhoods: Supporting existing neighbourhood services. Proposed projects:

- (i) **Neighbourhood Centre** (short term) – environmental improvements and shop frontage upgrades
- (ii) **Neighbourhood Parks** (short term) – transforming existing green spaces into new neighbourhood parks with improved seating, lighting and play areas
- (iii) **Collaborative Provision** (immediate) – coordinating more effectively the efforts of public and community sector service providers

C: Housing: Increasing housing numbers and upgrading existing stock:

- (i) **Upgrade of existing housing stock** (short term) – improving social housing stock within existing communities including Silverstream and Glenbank.
- (ii) **New Mixed Tenure Development** (short term)

D: Greenway Network: Linking existing green spaces and river courses:

- (i) **Rediscovered Rivers** (short term) – uncovering where possible the rivers and streams that flow through Ballysillan.
- (ii) **Continuous Footpaths/Cycle Paths** (short term) – establishing a network of footpaths and cycle paths as part of citywide project to connect open spaces, neighbourhoods, schools and Belfast Hills.
- (iii) **Orientation and Interpretation** (short term) – Interpretation boards, public art and events.
- (iv) **new outdoor activity and education centre**

E: The Park: Creating a new park for active and passive pursuits and transforming Ballysillan Playing Fields into Ballysillan Park; a destination that will cater for both active and passive leisure activities within a high quality parkland setting, portions of which would include new built frontage.

- (i) **Enhance sports provision** (short term) – continued upgrading of sports provision in the Ballysillan Playing Fields, including changing facilities, enhances pitch provision, lighting and mixed use games areas
- (ii) **High Quality Parkland** (medium term) – introducing formalised and attractive parkland features including new planting, seating, lighting and public art within network of quality footpaths and trails.
- (iii) **New Park Frontage** (medium term) – establishing built frontage directly onto the new park where possible so as to help keep it lively, animated and safer.

F: The Street: Formalising a new street along a stretch of the Ballysillan Road, alongside a programme of environmental improvements and introduction of quality mixed use development:

(i) **Streetscape Improvements** (medium term) – introducing a good quality street environment along a central stretch of Ballysillan Road. Improvement works to include new paving, street furniture, tree planting and lighting.

(ii) **Mixed Used Frontage** (medium term) – Provision of mixed use street frontage to include opportunities for community and commercial development. Opportunity for a range of residential accommodation as part of the new street frontage.

G: Leisure Plus: Complementing leisure and sports provision through establishment of a coordinates sports programme, upgrading of existing facilities and identification of additional compatible services.

(i) **Revitalised Leisure Centre** (medium term) – Renewal of Leisure Centre

(ii) **Compatible Service Provision** (medium term) – Supporting compatible uses from the public, private and community sectors to complement those at the leisure centre. Uses could include pharmacy and healthy food outlets in addition to the emerging 'health hub' concept at the neighbouring Everton Complex.

(iii) **Coordinated Sports Programme** (medium term)

H: Linked Education: Strengthening the relationship between the communities of Greater Ballysillan and its schools through utilisation of facilities.

(i) **Education Corridor** (medium term) – Linking up existing and proposed schools

(ii) **Potential Shared Facility** (long term) – Exploring the potential and viability of a new community educational facility within centre of Greater Ballysillan.

I: Ways to Work: Generating new economic activities within Greater Ballysillan by enabling local companies and new businesses to set up own door offices and workshops, supported in times by hotel facilities.

(i) **Ballysillan Business Centre** (long term) – Provision of affordable, short term office space

(ii) **Incubator Workshops** (long term) – New workshops for small businesses

(iii) **Hotel and Conference Centre** (medium term) – new small hotel as part of The Street

J: Creative Centre: Community arts programme for arts and cultural events with longer term aspiration to establish a creative centre, a destination landmark at entrance to Ballysillan Park.

(i) **Creative Centre** (long term) – Landmark centre for creative arts and industries

(ii) **Major Community Arts Programme** (short term)

K: Reconnection: Strengthen connections between The Street, The Park and neighbouring communities and facing challenges of existing peacelines.

(i) **Generational Projects** (short term) – Cross community projects over a period of several years

(ii) **Forging Cohesive Communities** (short term) – Initiate and sustain dialogue between adjoining communities.

(iii) **Connecting The Street** (long term) – Linking communities of Upper Ardoyne and Wheatfield to the new street and park via a short spur off the upper end of the Ardoyne Road.

(iv) **Phased Peaceline Process** (long term) – Shared road map leading to potential removal of all peacelines.

2	Key Issues
	<p data-bbox="308 241 703 275">Proposed Council Response:</p> <p data-bbox="220 309 1321 600">2.1 The Council welcomes proposals that set out a vision for the Greater Ballysillian area over the next 10 -20 year period, which should assist in planning any future investment in the area as well as informing the community planning process. The Council would agree that the aims and objectives as set out in the draft Masterplan are a sound basis upon which to assess project proposals. However, in the context of LGR and the transfer of regeneration functions we would highlight the need for further refinement of the project proposals and the importance of having have a robust implementation and delivery plan aligned to funding, resources, governance, roles and responsibilities.</p> <p data-bbox="220 633 1321 790">2.2 It would be useful if the aims and objectives as set out at the start of the draft Masterplan were aligned to the proposed projects which could assist in determining outcomes; for example the proposed projects around leisure would align with the stated objective of a Healthy Ballysillian and reducing health inequalities etc.</p> <p data-bbox="220 824 1321 1081">2.3 The plan at this stage does not identify the responsible partners or delivery mechanisms and this will be important going forward in terms of responsibility and delivery and in the context of managing expectations. The Council would endorse the principle of collaborative provision and the focus on capacity building and working at local level to ensure that the right skills, organisations and structures are in place to deliver effective community regeneration. It will be important that there is strong community involvement and responsibility and partnership working with statutory bodies.</p> <p data-bbox="220 1115 1321 1339">2.4 The Council would fully support the objective of connectivity and improved accessibility to the city centre and wider region but would suggest that this objective could be more clearly articulated within the actual project proposals. Key strands within the Council's draft City Masterplan include both the 'Neighbourhood City' concept with strategic service gateways and regeneration hubs linked to the city centre, as well as an 'Accessible & Connected City' with connected movement throughout the city region.</p> <p data-bbox="220 1373 1321 1765">2.5 The proposals in relation to leisure align with the Council's Leisure Transformation Programme and other strategies including playing pitches. Over the next 10 years the Council are investing £105million to transform our leisure centres. The Council has agreed a draft outline plan on how we aim to transform our services through a phased capital investment approach which is made up of 3 phases. Currently it is envisaged that within Phase 3 we will look at creating a 'one public estate' model at a number of centres including Ballysillian. The plan is still under political discussion and there is potential for some centres to be moved between phases. In terms of delivery, the Council's preferred approach is partnership working as demonstrated through our delivery in Phase 1 (Olympia and Andersonstown) and providing integrated services. The Guiding Principles underpinning the Leisure Transformation Programme include the following:</p> <ul data-bbox="363 1798 1321 2094" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="363 1798 1321 1865">• Quality: Council leisure facilities should be fit for purpose, attractive and welcoming. <li data-bbox="363 1888 1321 2045">• Focus on health and well-being outcomes: Working with others to improve the health of the population, especially those most in need, and those with the most to gain, is an essential priority to improve individual and community quality of life and if we are to limit the cost to our society and our economy of avoidable ill-health. <li data-bbox="363 2067 1321 2094">• Value for money: Future Council investment in its leisure estate should

	<p>focus on provision of a value for money leisure service demonstrated through user numbers, health and well-being outcomes and financial metrics. The physical asset base will need to maximise efficiency and income generation opportunities across Council assets and, ultimately, the wider public estate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balanced investment and accessibility: There should be sufficient provision within each quarter of the city of wet, dry, health and fitness facilities that cater for a diversity of activity and meets the needs of different ages and abilities. The facilities should be well-connected, welcoming and safe, and promote connectivity, cohesion, 'shared-ness' and access for all. • Partnership: Partnering opportunities (for example, with adjacent Councils, private sector, education estate and universities etc) and strategic opportunities should be actively explored, pursued and integrated into the transformation plan. • Affordability: A capital financing strategy will be required to support the building of a new leisure estate. This strategy will need to be considered in the context of current capital financing requirements and the commitment, as part of the Investment Programme, to set the district rate at inflation or below for the next three years. Financing will need to include revenue savings generated from within the leisure budget. A key element of the transformation of leisure provision will be to ensure its sustainability, in terms of programming and ongoing running costs. <p>2.6 The Council would support the principle of delivering underutilised land but would also wish to highlight that any new development should make adequate provision for good quality accessible public open space.</p> <p>2.7 The proposals for increasing housing numbers aligns with the Council's draft City Masterplan, which advocates for population increase and the potential contribution that housing led regeneration can make</p> <p>2.8 The Council would support the concept of developing an integrated greenway network, but the detail of this would require further consideration, particularly in terms of the potential impact on Council owned assets. The proposed Greenway Network projects are noted as being short term but we would suggest that these are longer term actions and would require further consideration to examine feasibility and sustainability.</p> <p>2.9 In terms of the proposals for enhanced sports provision and high quality parkland, it should be noted that under the Council's current Pitches Strategy new changing facilities are planned for Ballysillan Playing Fields. In addition, the Council is currently reviewing its Pitches Strategy and the outcome of this will determine the level of future pitch provision across the city including the Ballysillan area. The Council also endeavours to provide high quality parkland across all its parks and open space and to seek quality assurance initiatives such as Green Flag status. There is also a Playground Improvement Programme in place.</p> <p>2.10 It is also worth highlighting that the development of community gardens can make a positive contribution to the proposals for enhanced neighbourhood parks and high quality parkland. There are currently several community gardens in the area, including Glenbank, Ballysillan Community Gardens and Ballysillan Leisure Centre Community Garden. The Council currently works with Conservation Volunteers to deliver these and they are open to the local community. There is also a community garden at the Waterworks which is operated by 'Grow'.</p>
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2.11	<p>In terms of the proposals for 'The Street' & 'The Park', this concept of a new heart for the Greater Ballysillan plan area is encouraging. However the broad proposals contained within the plan raise various issues for which there is not enough detail to allow for an informed response. The proposals appear to impact upon existing land uses in the area and it is difficult to adequately determine the impact on Ballysillan Playing Fields, particularly around proposals for housing at the edge of these and the proposed new connection through the playing fields and leased site. The current Ballysillan Playing Fields is an important leisure and recreational asset for this part of the city and the Council's general principle is to retain and enhance open space provision.</p>
2.12	<p>In relation to proposals for commercial development, hotel and business space there needs to be a clearer articulation of the underlying assessment of the viability of such proposals. These should be based on a robust assessment, demand analysis and market assessment. Proposals to develop a Creative Centre would also appear to impact upon Ballysillan Playing Fields and again there would need to be a robust case for the proposed investment. In addition the viability and sustainability will need to be considered in the context of existing facilities and the Cultural Strategy proposals.</p>
2.13.	<p>In terms of proposals around linked education and strengthening the relationship between communities and schools, the Council would support the concept of shared facilities particularly given the capital constraints across the public sector and the desire to maximise the use of assets</p>
2.14	<p>The desire to generate new economic activities within Greater Ballysillan is positive. However, the emphasis appears to be on physical facilities which again raises the same issue around viability, demand and market assessment as highlighted above. There appears to be an absence of linked employability and skills development initiatives which could be established in parallel with proposed developments.</p>
2.15	<p>The creation of local employment opportunities could however support the concept of The Street and the establishment of a focus for the plan area. This concept would need to be more refined to consider the implications for the existing centres and their future relationship to the "Street".</p>
2.16	<p>It would also appear that the individual projects appear to be primarily focused on Ballysillan Playing Fields/ The Park and immediate environs. There is limited proposed provision for other areas within the plan area or consideration of how this scale of development would impact on the wider area. The reliance on the use of public open space for the development of new proposals also appears questionable given the recognition of significant levels of dereliction and underused land.</p>
2.17	<p>There appears to be some overlap with the Council's current programmes and initiatives. Going forward it may be that we can seek to align, where possible, programmes to ensure targeted intervention and reduce duplication. However more detail will be required in order to ensure aligned coordination and optimal use of scarce resources. The Council's Dilapidated Buildings project for eg could align with the proposal for tackling dereliction.</p>
2.18	<p>Future refinement of the concept proposals should be a priority. In the absence of a robust implementation and delivery plan aligned to funding, resources, governance, roles and responsibilities there is a significant risk that the Masterplan will be aspirational in nature and could raise unrealistic expectations. It is noted that whilst the plan appears to be post 2015 a number of timeframes are immediate i.e. 0-1 year.</p>
2.19	<p>The focus of the draft Masterplan is heavily reliant on The Street commercial</p>

2.20	<p>element, which is only an outline concept. However, if the commercial elements prove unviable following a detailed assessment or lack of market demand, then there may be a risk that the remaining components of the plan will become disjointed and unsustainable. The housing does however appear to be a major component and the phasing of this could be very important in order to support and sustain other elements of the plan and address the issue of under used land.</p> <p>It is also noted that the plan at the end of the document contains a number of elements/projects which are not referenced within the body of the report document and it would be preferable that cross referencing of both the plan and the report were consistent.</p>
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3	Resource Implications
3.1	Resource implications are unknown at this stage.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	Equality implications will be assessed as appropriate by DSD.

5	Recommendations
5.1	Members are asked to consider the above and advise if they wish to make any additional comments to the proposed Council response.

6	Decision Tracking

7	Key to Abbreviations

8	Documents Attached

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